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AMERICA: WHY WE STILL NEED SDI

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Andrew left one hellacious mess in South Florida and Louisiana. Despite hours of advance warnings from weather forecasters, the hurricane caught relief agencies woefully ill-prepared to deal with the disaster. Imagine, then, the chaos that would result if by accident or otherwise a nuclear missile should strike an unprotected U.S. city. The slowness and inadequacy of emergency efforts in the early aftermath of Andrew will be debated by experts for months, if not years. It was three full days after the hurricane slammed ashore on August 24, 1992, that a worried Kate Hale, Dade County's emergency director, pleaded, "Where the hell is the cavalry on this one?" Later, the Washington Post reported: "Six days after the storm, the best that can be said is that life across a vast swath of South Florida has been stabilized at a primitive level, where it is likely to remain for months, if not years."

Americans everywhere reacted in disbelief. Why, it was asked, with all our resources were we not prepared to meet the immediate needs of the disaster victims? "If just one storm can create such havoc," said Stephen McCormick, a media consultant with High Frontier, the Washington-based space defense group, "what will happen if our nation has a really huge disaster affecting tens of millions of people, say a major earthquake - the 'Big One' - that some seismologists are predicting for the West Coast? Even worse, what if we should get hit with a single nuclear missile fired at us by mistake?"

Before dismissing any such calamity as unthinkable in today's post-Cold War world, we should take note of an incident that occurred in the former Soviet Union not long ago, but which was ignored by our major media. In a *Pravda* interview in 1990, a Russian officer, Colonel General S.G. Kochemasov, revealed that the Soviet Union had accidentally launched a nuclear-armed missile during maintenance operations. Fortunately, reported *Pravda*, the engine misfired and the missile crashed a short distance from the launcher.

There have been other accidents at Soviet nuclear weapons sites in recent years. But according to the U.S. publication, *Armed Forces Journal*, the *Pravda* interview "is thought to be the first time that the accidental launch of a nuclear weapon has been revealed by any nation."

The Soviet Union is no more, of course, and Russia's Boris Yeltsin has been negotiating with President Bush for major reductions in strategic weapons on both sides. But even if the latest agreements are ratified, it would be another ten years before all of the long range missiles in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan would be dismantled, a delicate and dangerous operation in itself. Meantime, more than 150 giant SS-18's, armed with ten nuclear warheads each, plus several score mobile SS-24's remain deployed and aimed, one must assume, at targets in the U.S. Fail-safe assurances notwithstanding, we know now that accidents can happen.

There are other concerns, as well. Hardline Russian military leaders have openly disagreed with Yeltsin's disarmament proposals, and the Russian president's own future is uncertain. He could be toppled by a coup of hardliners overnight, and we could find ourselves back in another Cold War. Nonetheless, few of our lawmakers and policymakers voice concern. Indeed, critics of America's Strategic Defense Initiative, or SDI, continue efforts in Congress to cut back on SDI's budget to develop and deploy the initial stage of an

antimissile shield in the next ten years.

Hurricane Andrew should have served as a wake-up call to those who would neglect or shortchange our defenses against disaster, natural or man-made. The hurricane killed at least 40 people and destroyed some 63,000 buildings in South Florida's Dade County alone, leaving 250,000 residents homeless and 1 million without electricity. Total damage has been estimated at well over \$20 billion.

However immense the cost of Hurricane Andrew, it would pale by comparison to the devastation that could be inflicted by a single nuclear missile. While Andrew's top winds were clocked at 165 miles per hour and up to 200 mph in gusts, a one-megaton blast would generate winds in excess of **2,000 miles an hour!** And while the hurricane wrecked tens of thousands of homes, a nuclear strike would simply vaporize whole cities, killing millions.

As High Frontier's Stephen McCormick notes, Americans now spend some \$5 billion a year on potato chips and popcorn. "Why," he asks, "won't Congress spend as much to defend us with a missile shield, and stop playing politics with our lives?" It's a good question.

Talk about skewed priorities! Congress now spends about \$2.5 billion a year to run itself. That's **500%** more than in 1970 - and nearly 20 times more than it allots for Civil Defense.

Since its creation by an Act of Congress in 1950, Civil Defense or CD has had what might be called a "mission impossible." With fewer than 400 fulltime employees and a barebones budget - \$138 million for fiscal year 1992, or about 1/20th of 1% of the Pentagon's budget, the CD program has been responsible for planning, coordinating and administering emergency efforts that literally could involve national survival. As mandated by Congress, the program is charged with providing a national "system of civil defense for the protection of life and property in the United States from attack and from natural disasters."

By "attack", Congress meant "any manner of sabotage or the use of bombs, shellfire, or atomic, radiological, chemical, bacteriological, or biologic means or other weapons or processes." The term "natural disaster" was even more all-inclusive. It means, said the Civil Defense Act of 1950, "hurricane, tornado, storm, flood, high water, wind-driven water, tsunami (commonly called a tidal wave), earthquake, volcanic eruption, landslide, mudslide, snowstorm, drought, fire, or other catastrophe in any part of the U.S. which may cause substantial damage or injury to civilian property or persons...." Likewise perhaps as an afterthought, the lawmakers added that "any explosion, civil disturbance or any other manmade catastrophe shall be deemed to be a natural disaster," and therefore included in the Civil Defense organization's responsibility.

Moreover, and this was perhaps to become the stickiest problem, the CD's Washington headquarters was encharged with enlisting the cooperation of federal, state, and local authorities as well as the private sector in dealing with any natural disasters or enemy attack on the United States.

Ironically, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, under whose bureaucratic umbrella the Civil Defense program operates, has been roundly criticized for allegedly paying too much attention to "attack preparedness," especially now that the Cold War is over. In fact, many of

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FEMA's state and local representatives have refused to participate in civil defense training exercises over the years and in some cases have actually dismantled CD emergency shelters and warning sirens.

FEMA, which was created in 1979 to coordinate disaster relief, has come under withering attack for allegedly botching emergency efforts in the wake of Hurricane Andrew, and for slowness in responding to Hurricane Hugo and the San Francisco earthquake in 1989. But the agency is getting a bum rap. By law, the FEMA cannot move into action until the president declares a state of emergency and the governor of the affected state or states calls for federal help. Also, FEMA, whose annual budget is some \$800 million, must depend on Congress for supplemental funds to meet the extraordinary expenses of such disasters as Hurricane Andrew and the aftermath of the Los Angeles riots.

Few Americans are more aware of the immensity of the disaster that would result from even a single missile strike on U.S. soil. There simply is no precedent, other than the nuclear devastation in Hiroshima and Nagasaki that ended World War II. FEMA's 1992 report to Congress on the CD program and disaster preparedness contains the following advisory on "national security threats":

A review of potential national security threats from unclassified sources shows that, while there have been some favorable trends in the world, the federal, state and local governments still need to build and maintain capabilities to respond to consequences of an attack, perhaps more limited in scope but potentially catastrophic nonetheless. This conclusion is based on the following factors:

** A traditional assumption guiding CD attack preparedness planning has been the threat of a massive, coordinated strategic nuclear attack by the Soviet Union following the start of a conventional conflict between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union have dissolved, and their total threat is no longer credible. However, devastating strategic capabilities will remain in the former Soviet Union for many years to come; control of these capabilities, and the possible intent to use them, will remain uncertain for the foreseeable future.*

** While the nuclear capable republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which succeeded the Soviet Union, have expressed an interest in nuclear disarmament, it will take years to physically dismantle weapons. In the meantime, a radical change in political stability within the CIS, could dramatically change the potential national security threat for the U.S. As CIA Robert Director Gates noted in his recent testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, "even a diminishing CIS strategic arsenal will still be capable of devastating the United States and other countries. Therefore, as long as there is any possibility that turmoil in the regime could stimulate the emergence of a new hostile regime, the remaining strategic weapons will constitute a danger to us."*

** The international community is starting to recognize the importance of limiting the spread of high-level military technology, especially for ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction. The case of the Iraqi and North Korean nuclear programs shows that some nations will not forego developing highly lethal weapons if they believe such weapons enhance their foreign policy options.*

** Although the most devastating form of attack - massive, strategic nuclear attack - has dropped to lower probability, concern over other national security threats in more limited forms has not disappeared and, given the threat of weapons proliferation, may actually increase in the future. Therefore, the people and property of the U.S. remain subject to possible attack in*

various other forms from hostile nations or terrorists.

FEMA's report spelled out the continuing threat to U.S. security. An *America's Future* report in 1984, during the Cold War, cited some of the difficulties: Civil defense in the United States exists mostly on paper. The federal government's program, which costs about \$200 million a year, consists of little more than a vague "crisis relocation" plan. But relocation areas possess few if any in-place shelters, much less the stockpiles of food and other essentials that would be needed for many millions of potential refugees.

For example, a Gannett News Service survey of civil defense in Florida found that "local and state disaster plans were so poorly coordinated and conceived that millions of people could be put in jeopardy by the evacuation, as well as by nuclear warheads." One county civil defense director, Robert Lewis, put the problem in even blunter terms. "The whole thing," he said, "probably boils down to the most hellacious mess you've ever seen."

Just how great a "mess" can only be imagined. For instance, should a nuclear attack occur, most of Pensacola's population would be told to go to so-called "host" areas in Alabama via Okaloosa County. But in that county, there are only two shelters, each with a capacity of 15 people - in the relocation area. Also, the Okaloosa disaster plan calls for sealing off the county's borders to outsiders, and Alabama officials contend that the whole Pensacola evacuation scheme wouldn't work, anyway.

In South Florida, an estimated 250,000 vehicles would head north from Miami, only to run headlong into another 52,000 cars from Fort Myers along the same evacuation highway. And if the 250,000 Miami cars all did manage to get onto the highway, they would form a bumper-to-bumper traffic jam all the way to Atlanta, more than 600 miles to the north.

And so it goes, or would go, if America ever should suffer a nuclear attack, God forbid. Yet, despite such grim portents of potential disaster, the pacifists, "freezeniks" and lobbyists for unilateral disarmament continue campaigning against civil defense, arguing that it only makes the "unthinkable" more possible. In reality, the greater our vulnerability to nuclear attack and destruction, the greater the danger.

Danger signs are already clear and compelling. In early 1992, Boris Yeltsin's intelligence service reported that several nuclear warheads were "missing" from the newly-independent republic of Kazakhstan, formerly part of the Soviet Union. A subsequent intelligence report, said to have been shared with the CIA, claimed that at least two of the Soviet-built warheads had been acquired by Iran. And according to the Brussels-based newspaper, *The European*, a third missing warhead was believed to have ended up in another as yet undetermined Middle East country.

There have been other disturbing developments. According to Western intelligence sources, the Russian military until recently concealed the production of biological killing agents in violation of a 1972 treaty banning germ warfare weapons. And under a loophole in strategic arms control agreements, Russia's rocket command is believed to be secretly turning out an array of brand new long-range mobile missiles code-named *Fatboy* at a weapons plant in Votkinsk.

This August, a classified publication called *Military Thought*, the chief organ of the Russian General Staff, denounced proposals for collaboration between Moscow and Washington on anti-missile defenses. A nine-page article authored by three aerospace technology colonels employed "unusually harsh, Cold War language." Among other things, it accused the U.S. of seeking to "achieve serious military-strategic

tegic supremacy (and) consequent weakening of the Fatherland's capability to retaliate."

The Russian military publication made no reference to the problems of missile proliferation in the Third World. But a second article stressed the importance of preparing to wage nuclear war as the "indispensable factor in assuring stability...." Similar hardline expressions have emanated from other Russian sources in recent weeks. But *Military Thought's* attack on U.S.-Russian cooperation on space defense appears effectively to repudiate a joint agreement by Presidents Bush and Yeltsin at their summit meeting in Washington in June, 1992.

The agreement pledged the two nations to "work together... in developing a concept for such a (defense) system as part of an overall strategy regarding the proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction." The Bush-Yeltsin agreement referred also to the so-called Global Protection System, an outgrowth of President Reagan's 1983 Strategic Defense Initiative, or SDI, as "an important undertaking" worthy of implementation "on a priority basis."

Military Thought's "thumbs down" on the summit agreement brought no immediate reaction from Yeltsin. Indeed, it's now generally acknowledged that the Russian president has little or no control over the Russian military - a fact that makes arms control negotiations with Moscow dubious or even risky. Nonetheless, the White House has been pressing the Senate to ratify last year's Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START, calling for sharp cutbacks in long-range ballistic missiles on both sides. At last June's summit meeting, Yeltsin won U.S. acclaim by going a step further and agreeing to scrap Russia's city busting SS-18's over the next ten years. The SS-18 - the world's largest and most devastating ICBM - has provided Moscow with a continuing first-strike advantage of massive proportions. The only trouble is that Yeltsin's offer, even if ratified as part of START, would not eliminate all SS-18's until the year 2002 - assuming Russia's reluctant military went along. And even the most optimistic Russia-watchers are not betting on who'll be in charge in Moscow ten years from now - let alone tomorrow.

In the meantime, as Robert Morris, the veteran geopolitical authority, reminds, "there are still 27,000 nuclear warheads and thousands of missiles in the former Soviet Union, including those giant SS-18's, each with ten warheads. Can we safely count on Yeltsin's survival in the face of his seemingly insoluble problems and mounting opposition at home? And if he's replaced by military hardliners, what then? Even now, despite disarray in the former Red Army's ranks, there has been no significant reduction in Russia's huge military-industrial complex. This year alone, it's expected to export \$4 billion worth of arms to Communist China, including late-model T-72 tanks and at least 24 SU-27 fighter planes."

Nor has Russia withdrawn its 120,000 occupation troops from Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia as demanded ever since the Baltic states won their independence nearly two years ago. By one reliable intelligence estimate, some 600,000 troops of the former Red Army are still deployed outside Russia, more than a third of them in eastern Germany and Poland.

Nonetheless, preoccupied with domestic concerns, few of our lawmakers appear ready or willing to address such clear and present dangers to our national security. Instead, they keep insisting the Cold War is over, vote billions of dollars in aid for Yeltsin's "reformist" regime and call for even deeper cuts in the Pentagon budget. It's time to wake up and think again.

Heeding the lessons of the Gulf War, the Pentagon in September, 1992, ordered development of an anti-missile

"SCUD-buster" designed to vastly outperform the Patriot of Desert Storm fame. But the development of nationwide defenses against strategic intercontinental missiles - the primary goal of the SDI program - is now in danger of being written off by Congress, killed before it can leave the laboratory.

The SCUD-buster system, technically known as the Theater High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), calls for the production and testing of 20 antimissile missiles with supporting hardware over the next 4 years at a cost of \$689 million. A contract option, if exercised, would provide an additional 40 missiles for \$80.2 million. In an emergency, THAADs could be airlifted within hours to wherever needed. They represent the first deployable system to emerge from President Reagan's 1983 Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).

Engineered by an aerospace team headed by Lockheed, THAAD is intended to zero in on and destroy by contact enemy ballistic missiles at ranges of up to 180 miles. By contrast, the Patriot was designed in the 1970's as an anti-aircraft weapon and even when upgraded for the Gulf War its range was limited to about 50 miles. Several Iraqi SCUDs intercepted over Israel and Saudi Arabia rained debris on friendly territory. And one SCUD hit a U.S. military barracks in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, killing 28 American soldiers.

Henry Cooper, director of the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization (SDIO), has revealed just how vulnerable our forces were to Saddam Hussein's SCUDs. "If we had not had six months to prepare for the war," he told an international conference of scientists in Erice, Italy, this August, "we would not have had the Patriots that were used. Every upgraded Patriot fired in the Gulf War was produced **after** Iraq's invasion of Kuwait." While the Patriots performed as well as could be expected, said Cooper, "we need to do better. Patriot was not a sufficient defense of populations; it was never designed to be.... The kind of constellation we are now designing would have intercepted every missile that was launched by Saddam in the Gulf War - and well away from the cities, in fact, outside the earth's atmosphere."

The Gulf War, along with the demise of the Cold War, has led to revisions in America's defense priorities. Rather than focusing on the expired threat of a massive Soviet nuclear attack, the SDI program has been redirected to the possibility of attack by outlaw rulers like Saddam Hussein using SCUD-type missiles with extended ranges. The SDI's Henry Cooper spelled out the danger at the Erice conference: "Longer range missiles do exist in the Middle East, say of the 3,000-kilometer range.... And that is part of the proliferation problem. Such a missile in the Middle East could reach Moscow or London or almost any city throughout Europe. And you can imagine what would have happened in the Gulf War experience had Saddam been able to hold hostage the populations of the great capitals of Europe."

"Such missiles," added Ambassador Cooper, "are not hypothetical. They have in fact, been sold in the world market. This is a problem that is real, one that we all share. And while there are few countries that today threaten the United States, it is only a matter of time before the missiles gain the range to threaten our land."

Today, more than 15 nations of the Third World have ballistic missiles. By the year 2000, perhaps 20 nations may have them and some will be armed with chemical, biological and possibly even nuclear warheads. As Ambassador Cooper warned in a letter to Senator Sam Nunn, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee: "The threat to the U.S. homeland from accidental or unauthorized launch is present today, and the technology exists that would enable Third

World countries to threaten the U.S. in the future.... That is why it is absolutely urgent that we develop a system of defense against ballistic missiles...."

Nonetheless, SDI's critics made crippling cutbacks in the 1993 space defense budget, a budget that already had been slashed from \$5.4 billion to \$4.3 billion. Additional cuts of \$1 billion or more threaten to further delay or even kill SDI's program for nationwide ground and space-based defenses against intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Motivated by the Gulf War, the Senate in 1991 passed what was called the Missile Defense Act. Initiated by Senators Sam Nunn (D-GA) and John Warner (R-VA), the Act for the first time provided a bipartisan Congressional mandate to build effective space defenses for the United States. But when it came to providing the funds - estimated at some \$5 billion a year over the next decade, or about one-fiftieth of the overall Pentagon budget - Congress balked. It's a familiar story.

As GOP Senator Malcolm Wallop of Wyoming told his colleagues: "We had ballistic missile defense systems in the '70's that would have worked. But time after time after time, the Senate reduced the funding, reducing the development. And finally they were not up to the task, and they died of their own ridicule. This seems to be happening here again."

So far, only the Patriot's successor, the THAAD program, seems safe from the knives of the anti-SDI lobby. And THAAD is designed at best to protect "a small, European-sized country." Says SDI's Henry Cooper, "it looks like we'll end up by protecting our allies, but not the American people!"

The lesson that unpreparedness invites aggression was learned in the 1940's. The cost was in millions of lives. The world as we know it might never recover from a nuclear Pearl Harbor.

Missing in Congress and the public domain these days is any serious discussion of national defense. In fact, amid our preoccupation with the economy and other domestic problems, defense is largely a non-issue. Could history be repeating itself?

Consider this scenario: Most everyone's mind is on pocketbook issues. Times are tough. Unemployment is up and output is down. Europe's financial markets are in disarray, and there's fighting over territorial claims and ethnic rights. Weapons of immense lethality and destructiveness are everywhere. Famine stalks the continent of Africa. Rival warlords plunder and pillage. In the United States Congress, warnings of danger in the world are shrugged off. Advocates of disarmament have the constituencies and the votes.

A description of today's world? Certainly. But it also describes the era prior to World War II. Then, too, national defense and security were of secondary importance. In those years of continuing Depression, foreign dictators and their wars of aggression were considered none of our business. The demise of the League of Nations, to which the U.S. did not belong, was scarcely noticed.

On a personal note, this correspondent remembers the summer of 1935 when he enrolled as a teenager in what was called the Citizens Military Training Corps, or CMTc, at a regular Army base in Minnesota. We wore World War I uniforms, practiced with 1916 bolt-action rifles and paraded with horse-drawn artillery. At a briefing, our company sergeant, a veteran of World War I, urged us trainees to return for a third summer so we could get our commissions as 2nd lieutenants in the Reserves. As officers, he assured us, we wouldn't have to leave the trenches and "go over the top in the next war." We all laughed. "Next war?" Why, there never would

be another war. Just four years later World War II began.

That war caught America woefully unprepared. Our regular armed forces totalled fewer than 200,000 men; most of our planes, tanks and other equipment were badly outdated. At Pearl Harbor, we lost most of our fleet. Vastly outnumbered and lacking reinforcements and supplies, embattled U.S. troops in the Philippines surrendered after four months of brave but hopeless resistance. Only the protection of our two oceans, and the continuing resistance of the British, gave America time to rearm and, with our allies eventually turn back the aggressors.

Five years after the end of World War II, in South Korea, the U. S. once again was caught unprepared. Our outnumbered troops were nearly driven off the peninsula before reinforcements reached the scene. It took three years and 54,000 American lives to end the fighting and restore peace.

Only a little over 30 years ago, in September, 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis brought us to the brink of nuclear war with the Soviet Union - with scarcely a semblance of civil defense. Who can forget the panicky attempts to build backyard shelters and lay in emergency stores - just in case? And even today, in a world that in many ways is more dangerous, the U. S. remains defenseless against a single nuclear missile - launched accidentally or by some demented aggressor.

Before the election, the *Reader's Digest* conducted separate interviews with George Bush and Bill Clinton. Of the 20 questions, only one dealt with national defense. It asked: "Do we need to continue development of SDI - the Strategic Defense Initiative?" Bush answered: "Yes, we've won the Cold War. Aggressive, imperial communism is dead; there's no chance of its being revived, in my view. The threat to this country is unpredictability, uncertainty. A mad dictator somewhere who acquires a nuclear weapon could threaten the United States. And the best way to guard against that is through an SDI system. It can be done successfully. If Patriot missiles can work, this kind of system can work."

Clinton answered: "There is some argument for continuing to look at a ground-based missile defense. I will fund SDI research, but at a lower level than the Bush Administration."

According to the *New York Times*, Clinton had said that if he were elected he would cut \$15 billion to \$20 billion in so-called "Star Wars" financing. According to SDI's director, Henry Cooper, such cutbacks already were being pushed in the Senate, threatening to "scuttle" all plans for a missile defense for the American people - plans that only the year before had been approved by the Senate itself.

But such defenses were voted in the wake of the Gulf War. Today, to once more quote everyman's philosopher, Yogi Berra, "It's deja vu all over again."

Editors Note: Philip C. Clarke is a veteran journalist whose career with the Associated Press, Newsweek and the Mutual Broadcasting System spanned 35 years in the United States and overseas. With Mutual, he covered national defense and the space program. He now serves as Editorial Director of America's Future, Inc. "Defending America" is based on remarks delivered at an American Civil Defense Association seminar in Huntsville, Alabama, October 3, 1992.

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